

THE MISSING FEMINIST REVOLUTION IN SOCIOLOGY*

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Feminists have made important contributions to sociology, but we have yet to transform the basic conceptual frameworks of the field. A comparison of sociology with anthropology, history, and literature—disciplines which have been more deeply transformed—suggests factors that may facilitate or inhibit feminist paradigm shifts. The traditional subject matter of sociology fell into a co-optable middle ground, neither as thoroughly male centered as in history or literature, nor as deeply gendered as in anthropology. In addition, feminist perspectives have been contained in sociology by functionalist conceptualizations of gender, by the inclusion of gender as a variable rather than as a theoretical category, and by being ghettoized, especially in Marxist sociology. Feminist rethinking is also affected by underlying epistemologies (proceeding more rapidly in fields based on interpretive rather than positivist understanding), and by the status and nature of theory within a discipline.

A decade ago feminist sociologists shared with our counterparts in other disciplines an optimistic vision about the intellectual revolution a feminist perspective promised to bring to all our fields. As Arlene Daniels (1975:349) proclaimed in her contribution to *Another Voice*:

... the women's movement contributes far more to sociology than a passing interest would. The development of a feminist perspective in sociology offers an important contribution to the sociology of knowledge. And through this contribution, we are forced to rethink the structure and organization of sociological theory in all the traditional fields of theory and empirical research.

By now there has been an extraordinary amount of sociological work on gender. It is likely that more gender-sensitive research has been "mainstreamed" in sociological periodicals and conferences than in those of most other disciplines. Feminists can point with pride to important, even cutting-edge contributions such work has made to our understanding of society. Feminist perspectives have helped correct androcentric biases in established lines of work and have inspired much better research in the study, for example, of organizations,¹ occupations (e.g., Epstein, 1981; Glenn, in press; Kahn-Hut et al., 1982); criminology (Leonard, 1982; Smart, 1977), deviance (Millman, 1975; Piven and Cloward, 1979), health (Scully, 1980), and stratification (Acker, 1980; Blumberg, 1978). Feminist sociologists have helped revitalize the study of mothering (e.g., Bernard, 1974; Chodorow, 1978), housework (Berk, 1980; Glazer-Malbin, 1976), rape (Holmstrom and Burgess, 1978; Russell, 1982), contraception (Luker, 1975), marriage (Bernard, 1982), divorce (Weitzman, 1981), widowhood (Lopata, 1973), and the life cycle (Giele, 1980; Rossi, 1980)—topics which previ-

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1. For example, in *Men and Women of the Corporation*, Rosabeth Kanter (1977) showed that the sociology of organizations was tacitly skewed towards male experience. By analyzing women's experiences as secretaries, wives, and tokens in occupations where men predominate, she demonstrated the centrality of gender in the structure of formal organizations.

ously had been devalued or studied in distorted ways. And by attending to women's experiences, feminists have opened new topics for research, such as sexual harassment (McKinnon, 1979), wife battering (Breines and Gordon, 1983; Dobash and Dobash, 1979), compulsory heterosexuality (March, 1982; Rich, 1980), lesbian communities (Krieger, 1982), the feminization of poverty (Pearce, 1979), and the sociology of childbirth (Rothman, 1982). Feminists have also provided new insight into relationships between family and work institutions (Voydenoff, 1983), and women's and men's different experiences of being fat (Millman, 1980), of conversation (West and Zimmerman, 1983), of intimacy (Rubin, 1983), and of emotions like anger and love (Hochschild, 1983).

These are impressive achievements. And yet, we find that the impact of feminist thought on sociology, and the current relationship between feminism and the discipline as a whole, seem to fall short when measured against the optimistic vision of a decade ago. Peggy McIntosh (1983; also see Tetreault, In press) has identified several stages in feminist transformations of knowledge. The initial period is one of filling in gaps—correcting sexist biases and creating new topics out of women's experiences. Over time, however, feminists discover that many gaps were there for a reason, i.e., that existing paradigms systematically ignore or erase the significance of women's experiences and the organization of gender. This discovery, McIntosh suggests, leads feminists to rethink the basic conceptual and theoretical frameworks of their respective fields.

Feminists have done extensive and extremely valuable work in uncovering and filling gaps in sociological knowledge. This work has demonstrated systematic flaws in traditional sociological theory and method. However, feminist sociologists—especially when compared with our counterparts in anthropology, history, and literature—have been less successful in moving to the next stage of reconstructing basic paradigms of the discipline.² Other fields, notably psychology, political science, and economics, have also resisted feminist transformation.

The process of paradigm shifting, by which we mean changes in the orienting assumptions and conceptual frameworks which are basic to a discipline,³ involves two separable dimensions: (1) the transformation of existing conceptual frameworks; and (2) the acceptance of those transformations by others in the field. As we discuss later, of all the disciplines, feminist anthropology has been the most successful in both of these dimensions. Feminists in history and literary criticism have accomplished significant conceptual transformations, but have been far less successful than feminist anthropologists in influencing mainstream work in their fields.

Feminist sociology, however, seems to have been both co-opted and ghettoized, while the discipline as a whole and its dominant paradigms have proceeded relatively unchanged. Sociological teaching and professional life reflect this ambiguous relationship to feminism. Courses on "sex roles," gender, and women abound. But rare are the courses on sociological theory or methodology that even include feminist literature, let alone those that attempt to use feminist questions to rethink sociological canons. When we design courses in the sociology of gender or especially in feminist theory, we find ourselves assigning very little work by sociologists, while our feminist colleagues who teach comparable courses in history or anthropology are comfortable assigning readings primarily from

2. Our overall argument is that paradigm-shifting has proceeded more slowly in sociology than in some other fields. But we want to emphasize that feminist sociological work *does* provide promising leads for theoretical reconstruction. To give two examples: feminist work in psychoanalytic sociology, especially by Nancy Chodorow (1978) and by Jessica Benjamin (1980), provides transformative theoretical insight into relations between the organization of gender and personality formation. And feminist critiques of theories of social stratification (e.g., Acker, 1980; Milkman, 1982) have suggested leads for developing a historically anchored, gendered theory of social class.

3. The general notion of paradigm is developed by Thomas Kuhn (1964) in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Margaret Masterman (1970) notes that Kuhn uses "paradigm" in at least 21 different ways. Our use of the term is also very flexible. We generally equate paradigm with the basic conceptual frameworks and orienting assumptions of a body of knowledge.

within their own disciplines. Likewise, sociological work is underrepresented in *Feminist Studies* and in *Signs*—feminist journals which emphasize theory.

Not everyone shares our belief that a feminist revolution in sociology—a revolution we once anticipated and still desire—has been averted or forestalled. But this has been our persistent observation, and one we seek to understand. This paper is part of an extended dialogue, inviting reflection across disciplines on the process of feminist transformations of knowledge. We begin by comparing feminist transformations in anthropology, history, and literature—the fields in which we believe the most impressive feminist conceptual shifts have occurred. We hope to mitigate some of the difficulties of analyzing a “negative case” by examining the nature and effects of feminist reconstruction in comparatively successful cases. How would we recognize a feminist revolution in sociology if one had occurred, and how can we identify factors that cause the absence of such a revolution? An analysis of the comparative success of feminist rethinking in other disciplines helps to identify the nature of feminist paradigm shifts, and it provides insight into factors that facilitate or inhibit such shifts.

Next we examine sociology, a discipline in which strategies for transforming knowledge similar to the ones employed by feminists in anthropology, history, and literature have had more contradictory and, we believe, less radical effects. Here we attempt to identify some of the obstacles that confront sociologists who are trying to effect basic conceptual changes in the discipline. Our comparison of disciplines suggests that feminist transformation may be facilitated, or impeded, by the traditional subject matter of a given field of inquiry, by its underlying epistemologies, and by the status and nature of theory within each discipline, and within feminist thought.

PUTTING WOMEN AT THE CENTER OF KNOWLEDGE: A COMPARISON OF DISCIPLINES

Feminist scholars begin by placing women at the center, as subjects of inquiry and as active agents in the gathering of knowledge. This strategy makes women’s experiences visible, reveals the sexist biases and tacitly male assumptions of traditional knowledge, and (as we will explain later) opens the way to gendered understanding. This basic feminist strategy has been notably successful in history, literature, and anthropology.

History

Writing in 1979, historian Nancy Schrom Dye (1979:28) made a claim similar to the statement by Arlene Daniels with which we began:

By restoring women to the historical narrative and by uncovering women’s unique experiences in the past, women’s history revolutionizes the scope of historical inquiry.

Placing women at the center of historical inquiry has (for those aware of this work) begun to transform the grounding of the discipline as a whole. Social history, which attends to the lives of humble people such as peasants and workers, opened the way for the challenge women’s history has made to the discipline. As the late Joan Kelly (1977) pointed out in her article, “Did Women Have a Renaissance?”, starting analysis with women’s experiences has helped challenge the central assumption that history is primarily about politics, public policy, and famous individuals. This, in turn, has led to rethinking historical periodization itself. Historical turning points are not necessarily the same for women as for men; women’s status, for example, did not improve during the Renaissance.

Centering on women, which necessitates a focus on everyday life and the “private” sphere, has helped fuel the ascendance of social history in the discipline. In fact, Dye suggests that the discipline’s traditional emphasis on politics and public life may have been more a consequence than a cause of history’s having been, until recently, so profoundly male-centered. The extreme

sex segregation of their social class and period permitted the 19th century male founders of history as an academic discipline in the West to be particularly ignorant of female culture and experience.

Feminist historians have begun to reconceptualize basic understandings of social class and politics by questioning the assumed division between public and private life. For example, in a study of family and community life in the 19th century in New York state, Mary Ryan (1981) has analyzed the relationship between changing gender and family organization and the making of the U.S. middle class. Her analysis suggests the centrality of gender to class formation and the nature of "the political."

Literature

Literature, like history, has almost totally excluded women from its traditions of study. As in history, a tacitly male, white, and class-privileged universe has been represented as *the* universe worth studying, in this case in the form of traditional literary canons, which deemed certain writers, texts, and genres as central, and which included few, if any, women writers. Feminists have recovered and re-evaluated the work of such writers as Kate Chopin and Zora Neale Hurston, and the value of sources such as diaries and letters. This process of recovery has raised the question of why women (as well as working-class and Black) writers were omitted from literary canons in the first place.

Although presented as absolute, literary canons are socially constructed and historically changing, and feminist literary criticism has led to inquiries into the process by which canons were formed and transmitted. Paul Lauter (1983), for example, traced the historical development of the canon of American literature. He found that the exclusion of Blacks, white women, and all working-class writers consolidated in the 1920s with the professionalization of the teaching of literature (controlled by a small group of elite white men) and the consolidation of formalist critical traditions and conventions of periodicization, which further narrowed the canon. For example, emphasis on "Puritanism" as a founding period exaggerated the significance of a New England, predominantly male theocratic tradition.

In questioning literary canons and the relations of inequality they enshrine, feminists have developed new interpretive strategies which emphasize the effects of gender on literary creation. For example, in *The Madwoman in the Attic* Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979) explore the effects of patriarchal literary traditions on the work of 19th century women writers. They argue that the "anxiety of authorship" expressed by Emily Dickinson, George Eliot, and the Brontës is grounded in the historic denial of literary creation to women. Feminists have also begun to rethink aesthetic standards which have diminished the value of women's experiences and writing. Like their colleagues in history, feminist literary critics have begun to reshape their discipline in fundamental ways.⁴

The overwhelmingly male definitions of traditional history and literature helped provoke feminist transformation. The act of starting with women's experiences had dramatic analytical consequences because the traditional fields were so thoroughly male-centered, and because women were clearly there to be discovered and valued as participants in history, and as writers and readers. These two fields have made noteworthy progress on the first dimension of successful paradigm shifting—the transformation of core theoretical assumptions. But, it should be emphasized, the efforts of feminist historians and literary critics to influence mainstream work in their disciplines have met with considerable indifference and hostility.

4. For a sampling of the issues involved in feminist literary criticism see Abel (1982); Kolodny (1980); and B. Smith (1982).

Anthropology

Feminist gains in anthropology are impressive in both dimensions of paradigm shifting. We believe that the transformation of the core domain assumptions of the discipline has been more radical than in any other field. And these conceptual breakthroughs have achieved greater acceptance by many of the prominent scholars in the field.

These exemplary gains seem to have a source different from those made by feminist historians and literary critics. In contrast with the thoroughly male-centered fields of literature and history, there was a significant female imprint on the anthropological pavements from the discipline's earliest days. Thus Carol McCormack (1981) titled her contribution to *Men's Studies Modified* (an anthology that assesses the impact of feminism on the disciplines), "Anthropology—A Discipline with a Legacy."⁵

The legacy is twofold. From the beginning, there have been more women in the ranks of prominent anthropologists than in the other social sciences. In addition, the favored subject matter of anthropology—small, pre-literate societies where kinship is central to all of social life—has always encouraged anthropologists, even those concerned with law, religion, politics, and the economy, to attend to the sexual division of labor and structural and symbolic dimensions of gender relationships. As Anna Tsing and Sylvia Yanagisako (1983:511) put it: "the centrality of kinship in anthropological inquiry places the feminist re-examination of gender at the heart of the discipline." While there were deep male biases that led to androcentric theories, traditional anthropology, more than any other social science, took gender centrally into account. Perhaps that is why our feminist colleagues in anthropology appear less alienated from their discipline than those in any other field.⁶

Although traditional anthropology offered feminists a rich legacy, there too the strategy of placing women at the center of inquiry has elicited dramatic conceptual shifts. Perhaps the best example is the feminist discourse on the "Man the Hunter" thesis of human evolution. The female-centered strategy led initially to the development of a counter-thesis of "Woman-the-Gatherer," an important compensatory corrective that reclaimed for women an active, and possibly dominant role in the development of human intelligence and culture (Slocum, 1975; Tanner and Zihlman, 1976). Now the discussion has reached a more sophisticated, nuanced stage. Feminist anthropologists have suggested that the myth that "Man the Hunter" rather than "Woman the Gatherer" as the central cultural figure is one shared by members of contemporary foraging-hunting societies as well (Collier and Rosaldo, 1981).

This recognition—involving close attention to ideologies of gender in the context of social structure—is an example of the maturation of feminist thought from being female-centered to developing what we would call a more fully "gendered" understanding of all aspects of human culture and relationships. Such "gendered knowledge" has involved profound paradigm shifts within anthropology, such as the questioning of the division between public and domestic life and of conven-

5. The titles of the other essays in *Men's Studies Modified* (Spender, 1981) are much less upbeat, for example, "Some of the Boys Won't Play Anymore: The Impact of Feminism on Sociology" (by Helen Roberts); "Toward the Emasculation of Political Science: The Impact of Feminism" (by Joni Lovenduski); "Psychology and Feminism—If You Can't Beat Them, Join Them" (by Beverly M. Walker); and "The Oldest, the Most Established, the Most Quantitative of the Social Sciences—and the Most Dominated by Men: The Impact of Feminism on Economics" (by Marianne A. Ferber and Michelle L. Teiman).

6. Jane Monnig Atkinson's (1982) recent review essay offers a good example. The citations, which refer to articles in mainstream anthropology journals, convey the legitimacy of feminist anthropology, and her writing exudes a positive feeling about the relationship between feminism and the discipline. Similarly, anthropologists who attended a 1982 conference on Feminism and Kinship Theory "stressed the relevance of the analysis of gender for broad areas of anthropological investigation" and saw the promise of feminist rethinking of the discipline as its ability to "transform the apparently known into an area of exciting new inquiry" (Tsing and Yanagisako, 1983:511).

tional methods of categorizing pre-state societies.⁷ Anthropology seems to provide the best example of a discipline that is benefitting from a feminist "revolution." Anthropologists have begun to move beyond the woman-centered strategy to decipher the gendered basis of all of social and cultural life, tracing the significance of gender organization and relations in all institutions and in shaping men's as well as women's lives.

THE CONTAINMENT OF FEMINISM WITHIN SOCIOLOGY

Within sociology the feminist strategy of putting women at the center of knowledge has yielded valuable new insights and redirections of inquiry, as we detailed in the introduction. But we believe the results have been more contradictory and less successful, on the whole, than in anthropology, history, or literature. Specific subfields have been challenged, and many new topics added, but there has been less rethinking of basic conceptual frameworks. This may be due, in part, to the traditional subject matter of sociology, which was neither as gender-sensitive as in anthropology nor as dramatically male-centered as in history or literature.

In contrast with history and literature, the discipline of sociology was not organized around formal canons or narrowing definitions (e.g., history defined in terms of the politically powerful) which clearly excluded entire groups. Margaret Anderson (1983) and Helen Roberts (1981b) have each noted that the "bedrock" assumptions of the field commit sociologists, at least *in theory*, to understanding all institutions and the experiences of their members, which in turn produces beneficial potential for including women in their analyses. *In practice*, however, the standpoints of the privileged (western, white, upper-middle class, heterosexual men) infuse traditional sociological knowledge.

In traditional sociology, sexual divisions of labor and gender-related issues were considered primarily in the subfields of family, demography, and community studies, where the presence of women could not be ignored. However, sociologists of occupations, politics, law, religion, formal organizations, and even social stratification and social movements virtually ignored women; they tacitly or explicitly assumed male experience without including gender as a category of analysis. The fact that gender was explicitly present in a few subfields — albeit present in distorted, androcentric ways — probably contributed to the containment of feminism within sociology; and note that the presence of *women*, not men, made gender a visible issue. Because the subject matter of traditional sociology was neither totally male-centered nor basically gender-sensitive, it fell into a co-optable middle ground.

Over a decade ago feminist sociologists began to raise fresh questions about gender and social life, but our queries have been co-opted in several basic ways. We are glossing enormous complexity by sketching these patterns of co-optation, and even by speaking of sociology as a discipline. Sociology is large and fragmented; since the 1960s, when functionalism was undermined as the dominant paradigm, sociology has been a field without a center (Becker, 1979). This fragmentation suggests that a unitary "feminist revolution" is unlikely; the conceptual transformations we might hope for would have to be multiple and diverse. Feminist transformations of the paradigms of sociology have been contained in three major ways: by the limiting assumptions of functionalist conceptualizations of gender, by the inclusion of gender as a variable rather than as a central theoretical concept, and by the ghettoization of feminist insights, especially within Marxist sociology.

7. The culture-bound nature of public/private dichotomies is analyzed in Rosaldo (1980) and in Collier, Rosaldo, and Yanagisako (1982). In work that builds upon her earlier collaboration with the late Michelle Rosaldo, Jane Collier is developing a framework for analyzing and classifying systems of inequality in pre-state societies that rejects traditional kinship or economic categories in favor of brideservice/bridewealth systems of marital exchange.

Functionalist Co-optation

In the United States the sociological study of gender originated in functionalist family sociology and has been deeply shaped by the concepts developed by Talcott Parsons. Parsons (Parsons and Bales, 1955) translated gender divisions into the (female) "expressive role" and the (male) "instrumental role" within the traditional nuclear family. His analysis of the family (and hence, of gender) emphasized the function of "socialization," understood as integral to maintaining a smoothly functioning social order. This way of casting the subject matter has left a lasting imprint on the sociology of gender, shaping basic concepts (e.g., the language of "sex roles") and assumptions (for example, that gender is more central to the family than to other institutions, and that gender arrangements function primarily to insure social maintenance and reproduction).

Early on, contemporary feminists recognized the influence and limitations of functionalism as a framework for understanding gender. Several of the founding works of the contemporary women's movement criticized Parsons for what Betty Friedan (1963) called "the functionalist freeze," which tacitly legitimized women's subordination and their encapsulation within the family. Feminist sociologists have cleared away many of Parsons' blind spots by attending to gender in work and politics, as well as in families, and by emphasizing gender hierarchies. Yet functionalism has continued to exert a significant and, we believe, inhibiting effect on the development of feminist sociology.

Much of feminist sociology is cast in the language of roles ("sex roles," "the male role," "the female role") and emphasizes the process of "sex role socialization." This approach to the analysis of gender retains its functionalist roots, emphasizing consensus, stability, and continuity (Thorne, 1978). The notion of "role" focuses attention more on individuals than on social structure, and implies that "the female role" and "the male role" are complementary (i.e., separate or different but equal). The terms are depoliticizing; they strip experience from its historical and political context and neglect questions of power and conflict. It is significant that sociologists do not speak of "class roles" or "race roles." Functionalist assumptions linger more deeply in sociological conceptualizations of gender than of other forms of inequality. These functionalist assumptions have posed significant obstacles to feminist rethinking of basic orienting assumptions within sociology.

Gender as a Variable

Within the last decade an increasing number of empirical sociological studies have included attention to gender. For those working in more quantitative research traditions where problems are conceptualized in terms of variables, gender, understood as the division between women and men, has been relatively easy to include. Whether one is a man or a woman, after all, is highly visible; as it is socially constructed, the division encompasses the entire population and sorts neatly into a dichotomy.

A growing number of surveys (e.g., research on status attainment) now include gender (as well as factors like race, education, and income) as a variable, as do experimental studies (e.g., of processes of attribution). Here, as in other research traditions, sensitivity to gender has resulted in important revisionist work. For example, in status attainment research, measures of occupational prestige and socioeconomic position have been found to account more adequately for data about men — from whom the measures were derived — than for data about women (see review in Acker, 1980). Feminist sociologists working in this tradition have pursued fresh topics and developed new measures (e.g., to assess the occupational status of housewives [Bose, 1980]) suggested by attention to women's lives. The use of quantitative methods has provided information crucial to documenting problems such as gender segmentation of the labor force and the feminization of poverty (see literature reviewed in Ferber, 1982).

Much of this literature, however, is unreflective about the nature of gender as a social category. Gender is assumed to be a property of individuals and is conceptualized in terms of sex difference, rather than as a principle of social organization. Reducing social life to a series of measurable

variables diminishes the sense of the whole that is crucial to theoretical understanding of social, including gender, relationships. The use of gender as a variable, rather than as a basic theoretical category, is a prime example of the co-optation of feminist perspectives.

The Containment of Feminism Within Marxist Sociology

The development of feminist sociology has been contained not only by inadequate conceptualizations of gender, but also by ghettoization within dominant sociological traditions. Ghettoization is especially dramatic, and perhaps surprising, within Marxist sociology, where feminist theorizing has flourished, but apart from and with little influence on the "mainstream."

The relationship between feminism and Marxism is more complex and contradictory than the relationship of feminism to other sociological paradigms. On the one hand, feminist theory maintains its traditional status within Marxism as a continuation of the "Woman Question." On the other hand, feminists have generated a body of "Marxist-Feminist" theory that operates primarily outside "mainstream" Marxist discourse in the social sciences.

It can be argued that Marxist sociology has been even less affected by feminist thought than have more mainstream bodies of sociological theory. Analysis of sex and gender is not easily absorbed within a Marxist conceptual framework. The central Marxist categories which focus on production, labor, and class—as defined through men's relationship to production and labor—are more obviously androcentric than categories like "roles" or "social system."

It is possible, of course, to study women in traditional Marxist terms as is evident in the literature and debate about "domestic labor" and in the significant renaissance of interest in women's labor force participation (see literature reviewed in J. Smith, 1982; Sokoloff, 1980; and see Vogel, 1984). But such analyses, at their best, provide only partial understanding of women or of our relationships to men. And they do little to challenge or revise the epistemological or even conceptual foundations of Marxist thought.

On the positive side, Marxism has been subjected to full-scale critical scrutiny by feminists who have made a self-conscious, sustained attempt to develop a Marxist-Feminist theoretical paradigm that augments the theoretical effectiveness of both perspectives without subordinating one to the other (e.g., Eisenstein, 1979; Hartmann, 1981; Kuhn and Wolpe, 1978). In part this has happened because Marxism, a critical paradigm, tends to incite critical reflection on its own conceptual system. Thus feminists who work within a Marxist tradition begin with a critical stance as well as with a strong commitment to theoretical knowledge. More importantly, Marxist-Feminist work emerged in a political context that encouraged theoretical effort. Socialist-feminists who participated in the development of an autonomous women's movement sought to develop a relatively autonomous body of theory as a guide to political practice.

Somewhat ironically, however, this has allowed the ghettoization of the "Woman Question" tradition to continue, now in the form of "hyphen" literature.⁸ Marxist-Feminists have succeeded in developing entirely autonomous and almost exclusively female institutions, conferences, and publications. Resistance of many Marxists to engage with this increasingly sophisticated body of literature has left the rest of contemporary Marxist thought remarkably untransformed. For example, Immanuel Wallerstein's (1979) influential book, *The Capitalist World Economy*, ignores sexual divisions of labor and is uninformed even by feminist critiques of sexist language. Using Marxist definitions of social class, Erik Wright and his colleagues (Wright, Costello, Hachen, and Sprague, 1982) recently reported an empirical finding that "a sizable majority of the U.S. working class is composed of women and minorities." Yet they pursue none of the implications this suggests for rethinking Marxist theories of class to take more specific account of race and gender.

8. The term, "hyphen literature," refers to the hyphen in "Marxist-feminism" or "socialist-feminism"; see Petchesky (1979).

INTERPRETIVE VS. POSITIVIST KNOWLEDGE

Having briefly discussed the containment of feminist thinking within sociology, we return to the comparative question: What are the obstacles to feminist transformation within different disciplines? In addition to its traditional subject matter and conceptual frameworks, the basic epistemology of a discipline may affect its congeniality or resistance to feminist rethinking. We have observed that feminist thinking has made the most headway in fields (anthropology, literature, and history) with strong traditions of interpretive understanding. In contrast, fields more deeply anchored in positivist epistemologies—sociology, psychology, political science (excepting political theory), and economics—have posed more obstacles to feminist transformation.⁹

Why has feminist thinking been more successful in revamping interpretive rather than positivist traditions? For one thing, interpretive approaches are more reflexive about the circumstances in which knowledge is developed. They are thus more open to the question: What are the effects of the social and political circumstances in which knowledge is created and received? Feminists modify this question to ask: What are the effects of the gender of the researcher, the audience, or those studied or written about? Positivist knowledge, in contrast, is phrased in abstract, universal terms. It claims to be “objective” and “unrelated to a particular position or a particular sex as its source and standpoint” (Smith, 1978:283).

Values and interests *do*, of course, infuse positivist knowledge, as critics of positivism long have argued. Max Weber initiated a line of analysis, continued by critical theorists like Jürgen Habermas, which connects positivist science to processes of rationalization and control in industrial society. Specifically, Habermas (1971) argues that the attitude of technical and instrumental rationality, which is at the core of positivist social science, serves dominant groups' interests in mastery and control.

Feminists have built upon this critique to argue that positivist knowledge serves the interests not only of dominant social classes (the focus of critical theorists), but also the interests of men, the dominant gender. Evelyn Fox Keller (1982; 1983), Dorothy Smith (1978; 1979), and Nancy Hartsock (1983a) have each developed theories connecting masculine standpoints and interests to the structure of knowledge. They argue that the sexual division of labor and male dominance produce fundamental differences in the lives and experiences of women and men, with important consequences for knowledge. Using feminist revisions of psychoanalytic theories of development, Keller (1982; 1983) and Hartsock (1983a) suggest that rationality divorced from feelings, and sharp separation between the knower and the known—an objectifying stance basic to positivist social science—may be founded in the organization of gender. This stance is characteristic of a rigidly autonomous personality that, for reasons of social organization and family structure, is more often found among men than women. “To what extent,” Keller (1983:18) asks, “does the disjunction of subject and object carry an intrinsic implication of control and power?”

Feminist theorists, among others, are reconsidering the relationship between knower and known to develop a method of inquiry that will preserve the presence of the subject as an actor and experienter. This approach, as Dorothy Smith (1979) has theorized it, embodies “the standpoint of women,” a standpoint rooted in the production and maintenance activities of everyday life. Nancy

9. Various feminists have lamented their slow progress in transforming the more positivist disciplines; for psychology, see Sherif (1979); Walker (1981); and Wine (1982); for political science see Keohane (1983) and Vickers (1982). It is not by chance that feminist methodological critiques, emphasizing alternatives to positivism, emerged in psychology and sociology, for example, Reinharz (1981); Reinharz, Bombyk, and Wright (1983); Cook and Fonow (forthcoming); and Roberts (1981a).

As Candace West has aptly noted, the hegemony of positivism within sociology is reflected in the naming of journals. Those with a qualitative or theoretical emphasis bear explicit names (e.g., *Qualitative Sociology*, *Theory and Society*), but journals with a quantitative and methodological focus, like *American Sociological Review*, more often have general names.

Hartsock (1983a) proposes the development of "a feminist standpoint," an achieved and critical perspective on those activities. By preserving the agency of female subjects, feminist epistemological theory promises significant contributions to the hermeneutic and neo-Marxist critiques of positivist social science. This critique may help to clarify the barriers to feminist transformation of knowledge posed by the positivist tradition.

THE STATE OF FEMINIST THEORY

Not all of the barriers to feminist reconstruction stand within the disciplines. Feminist theory is a fledgling endeavor; perhaps greater maturation is necessary before sociology can reap the full intellectual harvest it promises. It is unsurprising, but somewhat ironic, that thus far the major achievements of feminist theory have been grounded in analyses of family, kinship, and "domestic" relationships. Feminist theorists make the legitimate claim that analyses of the far-from "private" sphere have important theoretical implications for all other arenas of social life, but we have only begun to reconceptualize conventionally-defined political or economic relationships such as the nature of the state, revolutions, social class, or power.¹⁰ That is, we have only recently begun the work of developing knowledge that is "gendered" rather than androcentric or largely limited to the institutions associated with women.

We believe that this underdevelopment of feminist theory has more serious repercussions in sociology than it does in the fields where feminist thought has made more radical progress. This is due to the paradoxical status of theory in sociology. On the one hand, much mainstream sociological work is atheoretical. The aversion to developing theory, which is present among many sociologists, is certainly part of the problem. Although gender may be readily incorporated as a variable, or as a source of research topics, this does little to advance theoretical reconstruction. On the other hand, the subject matter of most sociological inquiry may make the adequacy of one's theoretical perspective especially important. Complex contemporary societies cannot be grasped, or even studied, whole. At the same time, the potential sources of accessible data are overwhelming. Yet a holistic view gives greater analytical significance to description.

Perhaps that is another reason why anthropology—where the favored subjects of inquiry are small societies which allow one to retain a sense of the whole (e.g., to conceptualize and later reconsider a public-domestic dichotomy)—has been such a fruitful site for feminist scholarship. Because anthropologists have a more holistic (and gendered) view of society, they have been in a better position than sociologists to question overall assumptions, such as the division between public and private (Rosaldo, 1980; Tsing and Yanagisako, 1983). Sociologists have yet to fully problematize the "public/domestic" division, which separates the study of the family from the study of occupations, the labor force, and politics.

In history as in anthropology, empirical depth can be a profound theoretical statement. As E. P. Thompson (1979) notes, close historical attention to the complex process and details of social change can generate analytical concepts sufficiently elastic to capture the irregularities and particularities of patterns of human experience. Thompson contrasts empirical depth with empiricism, which fetishizes facts as the only valid objects of knowledge.

However, in most sociological work, "thick description" will not suffice.¹¹ This might have been less true had more feminist sociologists worked within the tradition of ethnography and community studies, but, for reasons unclear to us, few feminists are doing such work, and those few are

10. For feminist analyses of the state, see Diamond (1983) and Ortner (1978); on revolutions, Stacey (1983); on militarism, Enloe (1983) and Ruddick (1983); on gender and social class, see Rapp (1982) and Ryan (1981); on power, see Hartsock (1983b).

11. Clifford Geertz (1973) uses the term "thick description" to characterize the knowledge of ethnographic anthropology. His analysis echoes E. P. Thompson's point about interpretive knowledge being close to the ground and honed by the case at hand.

mostly anthropologists (e.g., Stack, 1976; Whitehead, 1976). More conscious and developed theory may be necessary to produce equally compelling treatments of the complex, contemporary social world. Generally sociologists study only a part, and often a small part, of that world. We need theory to help us situate the part in the whole.

CONCLUSION

We wrote this paper in a spirit of invitation, rather than final statement. Our starting point, and immediate concern, is the state of feminist thinking within sociology. But this concern has taken us to a larger set of questions that deserve fuller discussion. With over a decade of work behind us, what is the relative impact of feminist theory on the construction of knowledge in different disciplines? And how have different disciplines contributed to feminist theory? We hope this essay will provide further discussion of these questions.

Questions like these rightfully take us across disciplines; feminist scholarship has always had a healthy disrespect for boundaries, and interdisciplinary work has provided critical perspectives on more narrowly defined fields of inquiry. This is an important corrective for the way we have cast our argument. By focusing on sociology as if it were a bounded endeavor, we have given the false impression that feminist sociologists, historians, or anthropologists mine in separate disciplinary tunnels. Comparison of feminist work in different disciplines must be sensitive to effects of disciplinary training, but it also should more fully probe our shared terrain.

Our analysis has emphasized the organization of knowledge and methods of inquiry of different disciplines. Perhaps ironically, we have neglected the sociological dimensions of this question. Feminist transformations of knowledge are surely affected by factors such as the demographic composition of a given discipline, its internal organization and structure of opportunities, the availability and forms of research funding, and the relation of the discipline to the making of public policy.

We want to emphasize another, crucial corrective. A feminist critique of knowledge is not the only missing revolution in sociology, nor could it, by itself, produce an adequate epistemology. Scholars (e.g., Ladner, 1973; Rich, 1980; Wolf, 1982) have also begun to analyze the effects on the discipline of the traditional erasure and distortion of the experiences of other subordinated groups—Blacks, Chicana/os, Native Americans, Asian-Americans, homosexuals, working-class people, the peoples of the Third World—half of whom are women. Our focus on gender was necessary to analyze the limitations of feminist efforts to transform sociology, but it may have given the impression that gender is *the* central category of analysis. Feminist theory has itself been charged, justifiably we believe, with falsely universalizing the category of “woman.” Too often the experience of white, middle-class, heterosexual, Euro-American women has served as the basis for analyses that seek to generalize about the experience of WOMAN.¹² The inclusive knowledge we seek would as equally attend to race, class, and sexuality as to gender. The paradigm shifts we hope for are much broader, and more complex, than we have implied.

Feminists have begun to seek a more complicated understanding of both unity and diversity among women, and among men. We have also begun to recognize some of the dilemmas that attend our analytic stance. Central to feminist scholarship is belief in the deep importance of gender, not only for understanding areas specific to the experiences of women, such as mothering or rape, but also for understanding class structure, the state, social revolutions, or militarism—phenomena which are also shaped by the organization of gender, although this point has been obscured by prior conceptualizations. Yet in our efforts to restore agency to women and to develop knowledge sensitive to gender, sexuality, race, and class, feminists often have employed frameworks that essentialize differences rather than understanding that differences are socially constructed and historically changing.

12. For analyses of racist bias in feminist writings, see Hooks (1981); Simons (1979); and Zinn (1982). On heterosexual bias, see Rich (1980).

Thus much feminist work has unintentionally reinforced the dichotomizing ideologies of contemporary Western culture. The challenge to feminist theory has been succinctly described by feminist scientist and theorist, Evelyn Fox Keller (1982:593-94):

... the task of a feminist theoretic in science is twofold: to distinguish that which is parochial from that which is universal in the scientific impulse, reclaiming for women what has historically been denied to them; and to legitimate those elements of scientific culture that have been denied precisely because they are defined as female.

Thus far, feminist tools have worked better to criticize than to reconstruct most bodies of theoretical knowledge. It is time, we believe, to follow the lead of our colleagues in anthropology who have begun to reconstruct the core theoretical frameworks and conceptual systems in their field. Feminist sociologists have a crucial role to play in this project, because sociological theory has significance far beyond our disciplinary borders. Many "applied" fields like speech communication, criminology, education, and social work rely upon sociological frameworks. And feminist scholars in literature, history, philosophy, and other fields turn frequently to sociology and anthropology either to organize and interpret their data or to situate abstract ideas. If we can effect a feminist revolution in sociology, the results will be far-reaching indeed.

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